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## Review of *The Northern Cheyenne Exodus in History and Memory* by James N. Leiker and Ramon Powers

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*The Northern Cheyenne Exodus in History and Memory.* By James N. Leiker and Ramon Powers. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011. xiv + 258 pp. Map, photographs, table, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.

In 1878, about 350 Northern Cheyennes fled captivity in Indian Territory, in what is now Oklahoma, in an attempt to return to their homeland in present-day Montana. Before long, thousands of soldiers involving three departments of the U.S. Army, dozens of cowboys, a number of pioneer families, and such

mythic figures as Bat Masterson and Wyatt Earp were swept up in the event.

The Cheyennes successfully withstood several battles with the army on their flight. For much of the distance, they paused only long enough to steal horses and food; but, while crossing northwestern Kansas, a number of the Cheyennes attacked local pioneer homesteads. They killed over forty settlers, raped a number of women and girls, and destroyed tens of thousands of dollars of property.

The following April, less than half of the Cheyennes reached Montana. Eventually they were granted a reservation there. Many of the others, mostly women, children, and old men, had been captured in Nebraska. Over sixty of these would be killed after they escaped from imprisonment at Fort Robinson, where they had been held for nearly two weeks without food and water.

Even as the story was unfolding, people tried to make sense of the events. The eastern press used the Cheyennes' plight to champion Indian rights, while western papers demanded elimination of the "Red Devils." In the 135 years since, the story has been retold in books, articles, films, and through oral traditions, pageants, museums, and monuments.

The drama of the events has made it easy to turn the story into compelling literature, often exclusively sympathetic to one side or the other. But what has been missing in all of these accounts has been a broad look at the larger forces that influenced actions on both sides of the conflict. Even more importantly, no one has investigated how the exodus has been used by whites and Cheyennes alike to solidify and redefine cultural, historic, and social ideals.

This important book provides a deep look into the historical context of the Cheyennes' flight, the extent of its investigation making it superior to previous scholarship. For example, many scholars are familiar with the notion that lack of adequate food and medical services in Indian Territory contributed to the problems the Cheyennes (and others) faced there, but until now there had not been a thorough retelling of the political, logistical,

and practical issues that contributed to the problem.

More importantly, these two noted scholars investigate how the events have been recounted and redefined over the years. In a way, the exodus is simply the backdrop to their larger theme: how historic record, memory, geography, culture, and society weave and merge to create various, on-going concepts of identity in the American West.

Those who come to *The Northern Cheyenne Exodus* with little or no knowledge of these events might end up a bit lost by the lack of a strict chronology in their retelling and by the book's vast amount of information. But readers familiar with the story will find it very useful and thought provoking, allowing the account to shed a much wider light on the way we reshape meaning and history to adapt it to cultural, social, and contemporary demands. These subtle nuances, not often included in this or many other histories, make this book an important and irreplaceable addition to western studies.

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